

Trip 2 – Episode #54: Florida and Our Last Look at the Gulf

When we left New Orleans, we had a little over three weeks to get back across the Canadian border before our health insurance expired.

That sounds like a lot of time. But during that three weeks, we had committed to stopping in to see relatives and friends in New Port Richey, Florida, Atlanta, Baltimore, New Jersey, Long Island, Connecticut and Boston.

So, we were on the move! We passed through Alabama in what seemed like minutes. Which was okay with us.



And then Florida welcomed us.



Neither of us had been in the Panhandle before, and it was quite shocking to see the white, white sand in and around Destin. At first glance it looked like snow.



Our arrival in Florida was made all the more exciting by weather forecasts for the area, which didn't sound very pleasant. We had booked to stay two nights in Topsail Hill Preserve State Park.



And the first night was pretty calm. But the next day there were tornado warnings.

It seemed to us that there's no real way of predicting where a tornado might hit. And there's not really much you can do if you're in an RV when a tornado comes in your direction. It's not like you can hide in the basement. So, we thought we may as well be at the beach.

We found another state park where there was a beach, and we were told when we entered that there were riptide warnings. That meant you weren't even allowed to put your feet in the water. It sure was an interesting walk on the beach, with lots of interesting looking skies. Some just really dramatic, and others downright threatening.







We parked near the beach for a good part of the afternoon, where we were buffeted by a pretty lively thunderstorm for a while. (I had to tell Jim about it. He was having a nap.) But then everything calmed down, and we headed back to our campground.





I'll admit it was a little tense (for me. Clearly not for Jim). But at least we only had to worry about it for a day and a half. Imagine living in a house like this near the beach, during the increasingly longer hurricane season. Couldn't do it.



The next day, the weather was still a bit blowy, but we made it to our next stop, again on the water, in a funky little spot called Perry.





Next stop, New Port Richey, near Tampa. Whenever we go to visit my cousin Diane and her husband Jerry there, we try to go to Tarpon Springs, a fun town with a large Greek population and lots of Greek restaurants and traditions.

The history of the place is that there was a huge sponge industry in the area, and in the early 1900s, a smart businessman realized that the methods that Greek sponge divers used were far more productive than those of the American fishermen. So Greeks were encouraged to relocate, and they came in such numbers that Tarpon Springs became the Sponge Capital of the World, and the town has the largest percentage of Greeks of any city in the US. It's always good fun for a visit.



You can't go to a Greek restaurant without a little Saganaki. Opa!



The next day, we walked downtown Tampa's Riverwalk, which has really developed into a nice area, with lots of interesting spots along the way.











It was a perfect Florida day, with what Diane describes as an Athenian sky. And it was great to spend time with family.



After too short a stay, we got back on the road, leaving the Gulf of Mexico for this trip, and heading up the Atlantic coast.